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SEQUENCE OR HARMONY OF TENSES ?

PART II

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The first part of this paper attempted to show that harmony of tenses differs from sequence both in covering a narrower range of tense combinations and in applying to the indicative as well as to the subjunctive; that the explanations involved in the doctrine of harmony are too difficult for school use; that the subjunctive tenses almost invariably agree with the rule of sequence; and that no one practical rule can be made for the tenses of both moods, because indicative exceptions are relatively some ten or more times as numerous as subjunctive exceptions. The purpose was to show the expediency of teaching the rule of sequence even if it could not be justified scientifically. In this second part I wish to argue that the rule of sequence can be justified scientifically—that it expresses a truth without which the behavior of the subjunctive tenses cannot be explained.

Broadly speaking, there are two possible ways of conceiving of the force called sequence of tenses. Probably it is usually thought of as a force which compels a certain subjunctive tense to be used merely because the subjunctive clause depends on a particular tense. Opinions would differ as to the extent of this force and the amount of meaning conveyed by the subjunctive tenses; but those who hold this view must believe that, so far as sequence accomplishes anything, it overrides any possible tense-meanings and brings about a mechanical and meaningless tense-usage. This is the view which Professor Hale has attacked with such overwhelming success. I am not attempting to revive it. The second possible view is that sequence is a habit which virtually restricts the use of subjunctive tenses to those combinations which are allowed by the rule of sequence. According to this view, the subjunctive tenses always have meaning and are used to express that

meaning, but exceptional combinations are avoided if the dependent verb is a subjunctive. I do not know that evidence has ever been brought together to support just this view of sequence. This paper is an attempt to do so.

Before arguing the question, let me say that if this form of the doctrine has never been proved, neither has it been disproved or even attacked. Professor Hale's attack on the doctrine of sequence appeared in the articles already cited, in the *American Journal of Philology*, VII, 4; VIII, 1; IX, 2. The form which he attacked was the most extreme form of the first view just mentioned; namely, that the subjunctive tenses have no meaning at all, but are used in a purely mechanical conformity with the rule of sequence. His purpose, therefore, was to prove that subjunctive tenses always have meaning and are used in accordance with that meaning. He gave his attention so exclusively to this side of the question that he nowhere combats, or even mentions, the view here maintained, that habit led to the avoidance of subjunctive tenses in exceptional combinations. Yet, after arguing that subjunctive tenses have meaning, he draws the conclusion "that the tenses of the Latin subjunctive . . . tell their own temporal story—that no such thing as is meant by the doctrine of sequence of tenses exists."¹ Surely the only conclusion that is warranted by the argument is "that no such thing as is meant by *this form* of the doctrine of sequence exists."

The fact that indicative exceptions outnumber subjunctive exceptions ten times or more does not of itself prove that a law of sequence is at work on the subjunctive tenses, but it does demand an explanation. There are, of course, certain fixed tense-idioms in certain indicative constructions; for example, the common historical present or perfect with *postquam*, and the present with *dum*. But these account for only the minority of the indicative exceptions. The majority are exceptions by no idiom, but merely because the thing to be said demands a tense that is out of sequence with the main verb. Omitting these idioms, the disparity is not so great, but it is still great enough to demand an explanation. Yet in Professor Hale's articles I find neither a clear recognition nor a satis-

¹ *AJP*, VIII, 59.

factory explanation of the disparity. Hale and Buck's *Grammar*, sec. 478*a*, however, says: "Unrelated tenses are less frequent in Subjunctive than in Indicative clauses, because the bond of thought is generally closer between a Subjunctive clause and the main sentence." A somewhat more complete, and I hope a fair, summary of Professor Hale's views on this point may be that in the mass the subjunctive clauses are more closely connected with their main clauses than are the dependent indicative clauses; that therefore few opportunities for subjunctive exceptions are thinkable; that accordingly, in writing Latin, if one always uses the tense that corresponds to his idea he will inevitably use many indicative and few subjunctive exceptions, just as the Roman writers did. So far as it goes, this is a good explanation. A purpose clause, for example, is so closely connected in thought with the main verb that an exception to sequence is not often thinkable. On the other hand, the indicative relative clauses are capable of stating facts in any time, wholly disconnected with the main thought; they therefore abound in exceptions. It must be admitted that, in the mass, there are fewer opportunities for subjunctive exceptions than for indicative.

But when one descends to details, the explanation is less satisfactory. In the great majority of subjunctive clauses, exceptions are easily thinkable, and in fact do occur occasionally. In such clauses exceptions should occur as freely as in fairly comparable indicative clauses. I feel quite safe in saying that they do not; but an attempt to prove it would involve one in endless discussion as to which clauses ought to be counted. A fair test of the explanation does seem possible, however, if we can find subjunctive clauses in which exceptions are easily thinkable, but in which they are easily avoidable by the use of some other form of expression. If one can show that when there is a choice between an indicative and a subjunctive form of expression the indicative is regularly chosen if an exception to sequence is required by the sense; that when there is a choice between two equally natural subjunctive tenses the sequent tense is regularly chosen: then I think one may fairly say that the Latin writers avoided subjunctive exceptions. This is what I shall try to show. My evidence may be given under

six heads. I do not, of course, rely on any one proof, but on the cumulative effect of several.

1. The causal and adversative ideas may be expressed or implied in several ways, most commonly by the subjunctive with *cum*, or by the indicative with *quod*, etc., *etsi*, a relative, and, in independent sentences, *nam* or *enim*. When the sense requires a tense in sequence the subjunctive *cum*-clause is freely used, though somewhat less frequently than the indicative *quod*-clause. Compare, for example, *cum equitatu nihil possent* (Caes. *B.G.* ii. 17. 4) and *quod minus poterat* (Caes. *B.G.* i. 16. 3). The exact number of each kind cannot be given because no two people would agree as to which *cum*-clauses are causal and adversative. At any rate, the number of *cum*-clauses in which there is a considerable degree of causal or adversative feeling is nearly as great as that of the *quod*- and *etsi*-clauses. That being the case, a boy who has been taught that tense-meaning and thought-relations are the sole guides to tense-usage will feel free to use nearly as many *cum*-clauses as *quod*-clauses when he has to express in Latin such non-sequent ideas as "Caesar feared a lack of supplies, because the Germans neglect agriculture" (Caes. *B.G.* vi. 29. 1). But Caesar did not feel that freedom, at least while he was writing the *Gallic War*. When he wanted to use the present depending on a past he never once used the subjunctive, though he used 11 *quod*- and *etsi*-clauses with a total of 14 present indicatives (*B.G.* i. 2. 3; 6. 2; 38. 4; iii. 12. 1; iv. 5. 1; 20. 1; v. 33. 4; vi. 29. 1; vii. 22. 2; 26. 4; 35. 2). This number could be increased considerably, and I think fairly, by adding the indicative *qui*-clauses with causal and adversative feeling, and many of the independent sentences with *nam* and *enim*. Is it not a fair inference that Caesar avoided subjunctive exceptions in causal and adversative clauses, though he had no objections to indicative exceptions?

That some other authors felt the same preference for indicative rather than subjunctive exceptions in these clauses is shown by the count of two former students in whose care and accuracy I have great confidence. The causal and adversative clauses in Cicero's *Verrine Orations* were studied with the aid of Merguet's *Lexikon*. There are 93 indicative verbs in sequence, 28 out of sequence; 107

subjunctive verbs in sequence, 1 out of sequence. That is to say, when Cicero had a sequent idea to express, he used more subjunctive clauses than indicative. But out of 29 non-sequent ideas he expressed just 1 by the subjunctive, 28 by the indicative. In Sallust and Tacitus some relative clauses and independent sentences were included in the count. In Sallust there are 107 indicative verbs in sequence, 22 out of sequence; 25 subjunctives in sequence, no subjunctive at all out of sequence. In Tacitus, *Ann.* i-vi, there are 242 indicatives in sequence, 77 out of sequence; 128 subjunctives in sequence, 6 out of sequence. Whether or not these statistics prove the existence of a sequence-habit, it is clear that students should be warned not to use subjunctive causal and adversative clauses out of sequence.

2. It is a well-known fact that subjunctive clauses which express general truths regularly follow the rule of sequence. Why? Dependent indicative clauses and independent sentences which express general truths use the present freely in connection with past tenses. In fact, I believe the present is the more common tense when the indicative is used, though I have no statistics to prove it. Professor Hale, in his second paper, discusses the fact that subjunctive clauses which express general truths are usually in sequence; but there, as elsewhere, he is concerned only with showing that the subjunctive tenses are not used in ways that violate their true meaning. Therefore he is satisfied with showing that the imperfect is just as reasonable as the present in such clauses. He does not touch at all the vital point that the subjunctive clauses are regularly in sequence while the indicative are not. I see no explanation for the fact except that a violation of sequence in the subjunctive was avoided when there was a choice of equally suitable tenses.

3. The English idiom makes us feel that in result clauses like "they fought so bravely that they conquered" the perfect indicative should be used; yet the imperfect subjunctive is the common tense. It is true that the perfect subjunctive was used rather freely in such cases and is the most common of all exceptions to sequence. By some accident, indeed, the revisers of the Allen and Greenough *Grammar* say that in clauses of result the perfect

subjunctive is *regularly* used after secondary tenses; but a count in all the orations of Cicero shows that he used nearly seven imperfects to every perfect depending on past tenses. Yet if only the natural meanings of the tenses and the natural relations of thought control tense-usage, we should expect the perfect to be the regular tense. This too has been discussed by Professor Hale in his second article, and I fully accept his explanation. It is that *ut vincerent* originally meant "that they would naturally conquer," an idea inevitably expressed by the imperfect subjunctive; that this passed over, nearly or quite, into the meaning "that they did conquer"; that in spite of this change of meaning the subjunctive mood and the imperfect tense alike were retained by the force of habit. In such result clauses, then, there was a choice between an imperfect with historic ancestry and the force of habit behind it, and a perfect which would more accurately express the facts to be stated. In Cicero's orations habit triumphed over sense nearly seven times out of eight.

I gladly accept Professor Hale's explanation that the imperfect, like the mood itself, was retained by force of habit. But I add that that is what I mean by sequence, and that it is a splendid illustration of what I believe to have been the origin of sequence in all constructions. I believe that the subjunctive constructions in general began in expressions that were naturally in sequence, and that, through all the changes of meaning that some of them experienced, the habit of using the tenses only in sequence persisted. Possibly, therefore, instead of speaking of a single sequence-habit, I should always speak of a bundle of sequence-habits, one for each construction. But it is also possible that the result of these several sequence-habits was a single general habit of using the subjunctive tenses only in sequence.

4. The fact that one act is the result of another may be expressed either by *ut* with a dependent clause, or by an illative conjunction with an independent sentence. The resulting act often lies in a different division of time from the main act, as when the present result of a past act is stated. If such a result is stated in an *ut*-clause, we have an exception to sequence. So too, though for a different reason, we have an exception when a historical perfect

follows a historical perfect. It is well known that result clauses contain a relatively large number of exceptions, chiefly the perfect following a perfect, but not infrequently the present following the past. Yet I think it can be shown that such exceptions are few in comparison with the large number of times when non-sequent results must be expressed. In all of Cicero's *Orations*, out of a total of 842 result clauses there are only 18 presents depending on past tenses. It has already been said that the perfect subjunctive depending on a past occurs about once to every seven imperfects. If it is true that exceptional subjunctive tenses are avoided, we should expect a large majority of results which require exceptional tenses to be expressed in independent sentences. This is the case, if I may trust the count of my students. In Sallust there are 21 subjunctives in sequence, none at all out of sequence; but there are only 3 indicatives in sequence, 22 out of sequence. In Tacitus, *Ann.* i-vi, there are 42 subjunctives in sequence, 10 out of sequence; but there are only 10 indicatives in sequence, 86 out of sequence. No doubt stylistic considerations play a part here, for many of the results stated in independent sentences would make long and clumsy result clauses. But if only length determined the choice between result clauses and independent sentences, we should have to suppose that in Sallust, for example, all the short results just happened to be capable of expression by sequent tenses, while all but 3 of the results that were too long for result clauses just happened not to be in sequence. We must feel that the avoidance of exceptional subjunctive tenses has much to do with the choice of an independent sentence instead of a result clause. We must caution pupils against the free use of exceptions in result clauses whenever the thought seems to require them.

5. Since attraction of mood is not a compelling force, but one that comes into play at the discretion of the writer, the theory under discussion would lead one to expect relatively few instances of attraction resulting in exceptions to sequence. Unfortunately I have slight evidence on this point, and that may not be valid. What I have is drawn from Professor Tenny Frank's thesis on *Attraction of Mood in Early Latin* (Chicago, 1904). Among the several factors which influence the use of attraction, Professor

Frank finds that tense is the most important. He tabulates (p. 46) according to tense combinations the ratios of verbs attracted to those not attracted. Verbs which are in the same division of time, and therefore usually in sequence, are attracted more than half the time. Verbs in the present depending on the future are attracted about one time out of four; verbs in the perfect depending on the future, about one time out of five. These also are in sequence, though not in the same division of time. But other verbs depending on verbs not in the same division of time, presumably all out of sequence, show only 2 subjunctives out of 29 possible cases. I mention this evidence with some doubt as to its validity, because so many other factors influence attraction. But these facts are so in accord with the other facts noted, that the avoidance of exceptions to sequence may well have played a part in preventing attraction. At any rate, it is clear that if one should wish to write in the style of early Latin he must not often employ attraction where it would result in a violation of sequence.

6. Professor Hale himself admits mechanical sequence in a very limited field, chiefly in attracted clauses and in indirect questions depending on conditions contrary to fact,¹ as in "I should answer if I knew in what fashion we were (i.e. are) prepared." The meaning is "are," yet Latin says *essent*. The number of such clauses is not great, but their value as evidence is greater than their number; for here we find some influence causing a tense to be used in an unnatural meaning. In these clauses we find exceptions to sequence avoided by the use of a tense which does not normally mean what the writer wishes to say. A feeling which can bring that about may well have caused the avoidance of exceptions by gentler means.

I have now given all the evidence I have. I have found no opposing evidence. I wish the evidence were more completely worked out than it is, but I see no chance of my ever working it out as I should like. Taken all together, it seems to me to justify a statement that, although subjunctive tenses always had meaning, and although they were generally used in strict accordance with

¹ Hale and Buck's *Grammar*, sec. 480.

that meaning, yet habit, or a bundle of habits, seldom permitted the Romans to use them in opposition to the rule of sequence; that when the sense permitted or required an exception to sequence, a subjunctive exception was generally avoided, either by choosing an indicative clause instead of a subjunctive, or by choosing a possible sequent subjunctive tense instead of a possible non-sequent tense, or, probably, by recasting the sentence. This, it seems to me, is the true explanation of the great disproportion in the numbers of indicative and subjunctive exceptions. But if the evidence now presented fails to carry conviction of the existence of sequence, it at least justifies the repetition of a statement made in the first part of the paper. Even those who disbelieve in the rule ought to teach their pupils that though the rule does not exist the subjunctive tenses behave as if they followed it.